DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 512 CG 032 588

AUTHOR	Lang-Jolliff, Jennifer
TITLE	Mission Middle College (The Middle College Concept).
PUB DATE	2003-11-00
NOTE	9p.; In: Global Realities: Celebrating Our Differences, Honoring Our Connections; see CG 032 572.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College School Cooperation; Community Colleges; Cooperative Programs; Graduation Requirements; *High Risk Students; *High School Students; *Program Effectiveness; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Middle Colleges

ABSTRACT

Fashioned after the LaGuardia model, Mission Middle College Program began in the fall of 2001. It is an educational collaboration between the Santa Clara Unified School District (SCUSD) and Mission Community College in Santa Clara, California. It is a program for students who are highly intellectual and capable but uninspired and outside the high school mainstream. The goal is for students to complete their high school graduation requirements and progress significantly towards a Mission College vocational certificate or transfer credits. This paper presents 5 case studies from the Middle College Program and final statistics for the class of 2003 and their post-secondary plans. The success of the Middle College concept is based upon four factors: students thrive in a small program; they get a lot of one-on-one instruction; the connection/bond that is required of the program; and finally the commitment of the parents, students, and the teachers. (GCP)

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Mission Middle College (The Middle College Concept)

by
Jennifer Lang-Jolliff

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Chapter Nineteen

Mission Middle College (The Middle College Concept)

Jennifer Lang-Jolliff

The Middle College Concept- Where Did it began?

"The Middle College concept evolved in 1974 as a high school program on the LaGuardia Community College campus in New York. It is designed to reduce the urban dropout rate, to prepare students more effectively for work or college, and to attract more students to higher education. As a public alternative high school on a college campus, the Middle College program creates a continuum between high school and college, featuring flexible pacing, broad curriculum options, service-oriented career education with required internships for all students, and a college environment" (Lieberman, 1985).

Mission Middle College Program

Background Information:

Fashioned after the LaGuardia model, Mission Middle College Program began in the fall of 2001. It is an educational collaboration between the Santa Clara Unified School District (SCUSD) and Mission Community College in Santa Clara, California. The Mission Middle College program offers an alternative to the two large comprehensive high schools in the Santa Clara Unified School District. It is a program for students who are highly intellectual and capable but uninspired and outside the high school mainstream. The program is located on the Mission College campus and is integrated into the college community with a focus on successful student achievement. The goal is for students to complete their high school graduation requirements and progress significantly towards a Mission College vocational certificate or transfer credits. Students are encouraged to achieve high school and college academic success, to explore and pursue vocational and career aspirations, and to prepare themselves for future college experiences. The students enroll in secondary and post-secondary courses together each semester. The purpose is to provide a challenging academic program in a supportive community where students

can grow academically, socially, and personally.

Twenty-six students were chosen to begin the program in the fall of 2001 and then another 28 students joined the program the following year. The maximum number of students that can attend this program is sixty students. Currently, the reason for a small program is the lack of rooms at the crowded community college.

Case Study One:

Jenny was a shy but spunky special education student who has particularly supportive parents. In just one short year, she experienced tremendous personal growth. She needed additional assistance to survive within a regular high school curriculum and further support for her to be successful in an academically advanced program. Prior to her acceptance into the program, the college had to invite Jenny to study through negotiated high school-college agreements because of her need for student services while attending the Mission Middle College Program. Jenny worked harder than she ever had in her educational career and she said that it was such a relief "not to go through the door that everyone at school entitled the stupid classroom." It was the first time in her life that she was free of labels and preconceived notions. Having this new found freedom gave Jenny the courage to take college reading and math courses, and a dance class.

The battle for success was uphill with her learning disabilities but something inside her wanted to have this experience. Jenny struggled to pass her college and high school classes, and she never gave up hope. At the end of the first year, Jenny requested a meeting to discuss her future; the people present at the meeting were the teachers of the program, the high school special education services, and her parents. Jenny planned to announce that she preferred to graduate on time more than she wanted to finish the Middle College Program which would extend her graduation an additional year. She requested to move to an independent study program.

At the time of the decision, I felt as if we had let Jenny down because she could not take all the classes needed to graduate on time and that she had to decide between graduation and our program. Yet, early in the fall, Jenny's spring test scores reflected progress in her reading, writing, and vocabulary—she had jumped 10% across the board. This was the largest increase of scores within her entire educational career. Her independent study teacher contacted us and said that Jenny's study skills were strong and she was determined to graduate on time. In June of 2003, Jenny received her diploma and since then, Jenny walked through the doors of my office to let us know that she is taking two classes, health and child development, at Mission College this semester. Ultimately, I realized that my definition of success was different than Jenny's, yet the outcome was

the same. We worked together to create an independent learner, who is dedicated toward continuing with her post-secondary education.

Facts about the program:

Characteristics of a successful Middle College student: Enters the program with a 2.2 G.P.A. or higher, transfers into the program with roughly 105 completed credits out of 120 credits, misses an average of 3.3 days of education a semester, and is tardy less than four times within the first 90 days of school.

Characteristics of a student who struggles in the program and is considered "at risk": Enters the program with a 1.5 G.P.A., transfers with 84 credits completed out of the 120 needed, absent an average of 7 school days in a semester, and is tardy 7 times during the first half of the school year. Students who are accepted with this profile are placed in an academic support group for the first semester. They are offered study habit and organizational skills development, and we hope they improve sufficiently to maintain the student's position within the program.

Case Study Two:

Jack entered the interview room with a twelve-inch Mohawk, Dr. Martens (boots), and a military coat. His appearance reflected a young man who screamed, "I am an individual," and he presented a story that absolutely amazed the interview panel. Jack was barely surviving high school and wanted out in the worst way. He understood the value of a high school diploma, so Jack found his niche at high school by working in the CHAMPS Program. The program presents a hospitality concept taught at the local high school; students run a restaurant out of a modified high school room. The students accept reservations and serve amazing meals from a professional kitchen. CHAMPS students earn school elective credits for working in the program. Jack was bright, intelligent, and he knew what he wanted to be in life, "I want to be a chef!" He was two moments away from dropping out of school when he heard about the middle college program. The program was his ticket to "freedom"; it would take him away from the high school drama and the boring classes.

Jack was accepted into the Middle College program and eagerly began taking classes. Jack was like a sponge soaking up water after a long drought. He became a strong supporter of the program, and urged other students to take the same risks. He believed that other students would find their niche in this program. The Jack that we had grown to love had changed over the summer. By October of his senior year, Jack sat us down and said directly, "I have had enough of school. I do not want to work this hard any more. I need a break." With that announcement, Jack made arrangements to finish the few courses that he needed to graduate. Loosing

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Jack was like loosing the backbone of our program. Jack represented everything that we searched for in a student: bright, unchallenged, articulate, goal oriented, and he made me laugh at myself and encouraged me to not take life so seriously.

Each day that passed, someone in the class would say, "I miss Jack so much!" But as quickly as Jack had decided to leave, he also decided to return. It was two days prior to the winter break when Jack walked through the door of my classroom. He screamed, "I have returned," sat in his old seat and he began to learn again. It was later that I discovered that Jack returned for three reasons: 1) he was tired of "stupid people" and he was not learning anything by filling out dittos at the alternative high school setting, 2) he missed being challenged, and 3) his girlfriend threatened to leave him if he did not return and finish the task he had started. Jack finished his job as a Middle College student, graduating with his class, and was one of the keynote speakers at the graduation (not a dry eye in the building when he finished his speech).

Update: Jack came back to the program this fall to be on a student panel. He wants to be an apprentice with a machine shop or he wants to find a career in welding. He discovered his love for metalsmithing when he took a class at Mission College. The cooking dream is on the back burner because he is unable to afford the cost of the culinary institute.

Retention Rates:

Fall 2001	Junior retention	78%
Spring 2002	Junior retention	74%
Fall 2002	Junior retention	94%
	Senior retention	93%
Spring 2002	Junior retention	90%
	Senior retention	100%

Middle Colleges are successful if their retention rates within their first five years of operation are within the 50-60 percentiles.

Case Study Three:

Working to overcome his shy demeanor was one of the many reasons that John entered the program. He was not outspoken back at the high school and there was a great fear that he was falling through the "educational crack" and might possibly drop out of school if assistance was not given to him. Assistance was found in the form of the Middle College program: one-on-one attention, tutoring after school, and smaller classes that allowed him to exercise his opinion during class discussions. Because John was a sensitive student, when 9/11 occurred weeks into his junior year, he began to shut down and not want to live in a world that was so mean, cruel, unjust, and racist.

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That event changed the way John saw life, which meant that he went into a deep depression. It was hard to get him to school and there were times that we (the teachers) would pick him up at his house in the mornings to make sure he would get to school. His motivation and desire to excel in school became secondary to making sure he could save his part of the world. Many hours of tutoring, counseling, and parent meetings were spent to keep John afloat both his junior and senior year. The good news is that he graduated with his class in the spring of 2003 and began to look at the possibilities in the world instead of the impossibilities. He is currently planning on going to Costa Rica with his Mission College Tropical Ecology class to visit rainforests and experience first hand a different ecological system and culture.

It is ironic that a student who no so long ago was unable to get out of bed and get to school now is attending college classes at 8 am and is on time. He has become an active participant who will venture out of California in January and experience the world and all its glory.

Middle College recruitment begins in March, applications are turned in towards the beginning of April, and interviewing occurs during Spring Break. The 20-30 minute interview is designed to identify the student's willingness to make significant changes required to succeed. G.P.A.'s of students interviewed vary from 1.7 to 3.8.

Case Study Four:

An old sofa in a single-wide portable was the place where I first met Ivy. Her eyes barely glanced up through her black bangs and her voice was soft and introverted. Ivy wanted to be a part of the program to see if she could learn to grow and change, a challenge that she had issued to herself long before she walked into that room for the interview.

Growth and change were two adjectives that Ivy embraced when she started the Middle College program. Painfully, Ivy declined to make a class presentation in the first weeks of the program; she would rather take a zero than make a presentation with anyone staring at her. Ivy was one of eight students chosen to participate in the Stanford Lively Arts Program (see box below). World-class performing artists came to Mission College to conduct intimate workshops with the eight students, who then attended the public performance at Stanford University. The experiences would vary from learning to express emotion through dance or recreating scenes from the student's childhood. This experience changed Ivy so that she had the courage to talk in front of others and even lead a parent night for the new students, welcoming the parents and students to a program that changes lives. Ivy was the one student who made the largest personal gains and the largest academic growth by raising her G.P.A. from a 1.70 to a 2.20 within three college semesters.

Update: Ivy is currently taking classes as a freshperson at Mission College and is saving money so that she can continue her skydiving classes. She wants to have no regrets in her adult life so she is going to conquer each one of her desires and challenges one at a time.

Stanford Lively Arts Partnership for Success Program is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of local high school students through a program of quality exposure to the arts. The Partners for Success program helps students explore their own creativity by connecting them to world-class artists and performances. Often the students interact with artists in small, intimate settings that provide ample opportunity to satisfy curiosities, get personal attention, and as a result deepen the experience as a whole. For example students met Ronald K. Brown at Mission's dance studio, worked with him for two hours exploring dance/mind/expression, and then attended a performance by Ronald K. Brown in which they watched the elements that were taught to them be performed on stage. Lively discussions take place after these events and the students who have experienced this program have fallen in love with the arts.

Case Study Five:

Ahmed's goal from the first moment that he stepped foot on the college campus was to be the first person in his family to graduate from high school and also receive his A.A. from Mission College. He was taking 15 units of high school classes and an average of 18 units of college classes for each of the four semesters that he attended the program. There were days that I wanted to pull out a cot from the corner of my class and give him a grade for sleeping. Ahmed found strength from deep within his soul to accomplish anything he set his mind to. He emerged as a natural leader of the college campus after 9/11 when he brought the school down with applause after he gave the most poignant speech on equality and tolerance. That day he shared the microphone with four instructors that held too many degrees to mention and yet he was the most articulate and the most level-headed in the bunch. The Middle College experience only enhanced the strength that he naturally had within his being, but it was an honor to see him become the youngest president of the Muslim Association and be given the opportunity to run for ASB president. Because of family commitments, Ahmed moved to southern California and will continue his studies in medicine at the University of California Irvine. A man with such drive and determination, nothing will stand in his way of achieving his dreams and making them a reality.

Looking ahead to college:

Here are the final statistics for the class of 2003 and their post-secondary plans:

* Private School (in state)	1 student	4%
* Out of State (NYU)	1 student	4 %
* UC	4 students	16.6%
* CSU	3 students	12.5%
* Mission Community College	9 students	37.5%
Want an A.A.	6 students	
Transfer to 4 year	3 students	
* Other Community Colleges	3 students	12.5%
* Trade Schools	2 students	8%
* Midwifery School	1 student	4%

* 24 out of 26 students were present during the survey issued in class
* All graduating seniors have plans for their future after leaving the Middle College Program.

Further studies will be taken over the next four years to measure the outcome.

Conclusion

The success of the Middle College concept is based upon four factors: students thrive in a small program; they get a lot of one-on-one instruction; the connection/bond that is required of the program; and finally the commitment of the parents, students, and the teachers is what creates the recipe for success.

We graduated our first class on June 6, 2003, a day that encompassed a multitude of emotions. Many tears were shed that day because twenty six students who entered "at risk" for various reasons and who may have taken years to find their strengths graduated with much more than a high school diploma.

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